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ITEM 8:* THE ENVIRONMENT FUND, OTHER FINANCIAL MATTERS AND ADMINISTRATION

IMPROVEMENT OF FACILITIES AT THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE AT NAIROBI

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

This report, prepared in response to paragraph 6 of Governing Council decision 16/1, covers the current status of measures at UNEP headquarters to improve office accommodation, communications and the transmission of Governing Council documents to Governments by e-mail.

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish:

1. To note the report of the Executive Director on the improvement of facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi;

2. To express its gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Kenya for the assistance that it has provided the Executive Director in improving the facilities at UNEP headquarters;

3. To urge the Government of the Republic of Kenya to continue to assist the Executive Director in improving the facilities at UNEP headquarters and, in particular, to ensure that the relevant government departments and statutory bodies include, as a priority in their development plans and budgets, the investments that are necessary to improve the communications infrastructure so as to enable the United Nations to gain full benefit from its own investments in communications facilities at its office at Nairobi;

4. To keep under review the issue of using electronic mail to distribute official documents of the Governing Council to Governments.

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* Refers to the number of the item on the provisional agenda (UNEP/GC.17/1).

IMPROVEMENT OF FACILITIES AT THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE AT NAIROBI

Introduction

1. By paragraph 6 of decision 16/1 the Executive Director was requested to continue negotiations with the host Government with a view to improving the facilities available at the UNEP headquarters office in Nairobi, including communications services, and to report progress to the Governing Council at its seventeenth session. This report has been prepared in response to that request.

A. *Office accommodation*

2. In its decision 16/45 on programme and programme support costs, the Governing Council approved a loan of $6 million from the Environment Fund to the regular budget of the United Nations for the construction of new office accommodation at Gigiri, where the United Nations Office at Nairobi is located. These new offices, which were due to be completed by the end of 1992, are not now expected to be ready until March/April 1993. At that time, UNEP will consolidate all its Nairobi offices in contiguous blocks in the Gigiri complex, including those offices that have had to occupy rented accommodation elsewhere. Consolidation of the UNEP offices in the same area of Gigiri is expected to facilitate day-to-day contact amongst UNEP personnel. Overall, UNEP is expected to occupy approximately one and a half additional blocks after the completion of the new buildings.

3. Prior to and during the construction for the new office accommodation, negotiations were held on numerous occasions with the Kenyan authorities to secure the assistance necessary. The Kenyan authorities were forthcoming throughout with this assistance, which included granting the United Nations subcontractors an exemption from customs duty and value added tax in respect of supplies and services requested for the project. Without this exemption, the project could not have gone ahead except at significantly higher cost.

B. *Communications*

4. Frequent discussions have been held with the Kenyan authorities in connection with the improvement of internal and external telephonic communication facilities at Gigiri. The Kenyan authorities have always been most helpful in these negotiations, although they were often faced with physical and financial problems in providing the services deemed necessary by UNEP to enable it to operate its communications systems without constraint. It has to be said that all problems have not yet been overcome.

5. The Kenyan telecommunications authorities have advised the United Nations that technical options are available to improve telephonic facilities at Gigiri; unfortunately, these have not always been made put at the disposal of the United Nations. A new modern private automatic branch exchange (PABX) with considerably greater capacity has now been installed by the United Nations in the Gigiri complex and should provide a substantial increase in line capacity and allow direct dialling by external callers. To be effective, however, this PABX has to be connected by a digital line with the same features to an exchange operated by the Kenya telecommunications authorities. That line is not currently available and the United Nations has not been given a date or schedule for its installation. One hundred and fifty additional telephone lines have been requested but only ten have been offered

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and the current problem of congestion on telephonic lines to Gigiri is likely to remain until all the additional lines are provided. Some overseas telephone corporations have been granted priority access to international telephonic gateways but the United Nations has not been given this priority. These are therefore problems that have yet to be overcome. Discussions on these issues are continuing with the Kenyan authorities and it is hoped that further progress will be made before the Council meets.

6. Subject to the approval of the General Assembly, the United Nations, with the agreement of the Government of Kenya, proposes to install a satellite ground station at Gigiri before the end of 1993. That ground station will provide UNEP with direct data, voice and facsimile communications to all other United Nations sites that are part of the satellite system. It is understood that this will also provide access to the normal public telephone system at the same time.

7. UNEP has itself started to develop e-mail communications with the offices away from Nairobi. A pilot scheme with the office in Mexico City is operational and the aim is now to spread this system to all UNEP's external offices.

C. *Possibility of transmitting Governing Council documents by electronic mail*

8. In response to Governing Council decision 16/5 of 31 May 1991 on the rationalization of Governing Council documentation, the Executive Director wrote to all Governments on 8 November 1991, bringing to their attention, in particular, paragraph 3 of the decision, which requested "the Executive Director to investigate the possibility for making official documents of the Governing Council available via electronic data networks, provided that each and every State member of the United Nations or member of a specialized agency or of the International Atomic Energy Agency has access to such facilities".

9. Governments were requested to inform UNEP whether their designated official channel of communication had access to electronic data networks, and, if so, to provide their electronic data "address" or, if not, to inform the Executive Director whether they had plans for, or intentions of, obtaining such facilities.

10. As of 1 January 1993, only 56 (15 developed and 41 developing) Governments, or 32.3 per cent of those to which the letter was addressed, had replied. Of this number, only six or 10 per cent of the Governments stated that they had an electronic data network and provided their data "addresses", fourteen (25 per cent) said that they had plans for the establishment of an electronic data network, and thirty-six (65 per cent) replied that they did not have such a facility and did not foresee its establishment in the near future.

11. Under the circumstances, it would seem that at the present time it is not feasible to make official documents of the Governing Council available to Governments via electronic data networks. The secretariat is, however, pursuing the matter with Permanent Representatives to UNEP in Nairobi and is exploring alternative means of electronic distribution of documents.